

We Are Synodal

Synodal is a word that may be unfamiliar to many. As applied to the Synodal Catholic Church, our use of this word to describe ourselves draws on ancient practices of the Church.

In Acts 1:15 – 26, we find the “whole church” coming together to select a replacement for the apostle Judas. This demonstrates the understanding even at this early stage in the development of the church that the collective wisdom of the faithful was far superior and more valid than any single voice. In the Didache, the oldest surviving catechism, written in the 1st century, we find chapter 15 directing: “You [the Faithful] must, then, elect for yourselves bishops and deacons...”ⁱ. This is further confirmed in the writings of St. Clement, that bishops should be chosen “with the consent of the whole Church...”ⁱⁱ.

This collective voice is endorsed in the 3rd century by St. Cyprian when he writes of the people having the right not only to elect, but also to reject and even recall bishops: “The people themselves most especially have the power to choose worthy bishops or to reject unworthy ones”ⁱⁱⁱ. Two popes even spoke of the importance and wisdom of this collective voice: Pope St. Celestine said: “No one is given the episcopate uninvited. The consent and desire of the clerics, the people, and leadership are required”^{iv}. And Pope St. Leo the Great wrote: “Let him who will stand before all, be elected by all”^v.

This practice of listening to the voices of all went beyond the election of deacons, presbyters, and bishops. In Acts 15 we find the Apostles coming together in council to decide what burden should be placed on non-Jews regarding circumcision and dietary laws. St. Cyprian, following the ancient Roman dictate that “Whatever affects everyone must be decided upon by everyone,” wrote to his priests and deacons: “From the beginning of my episcopate I have been determined to undertake nothing on my own private judgment without consulting you and gaining the assent of the people”^{vi}.

Drawing on these earliest practices of the Church, we in the Communion of Synodal Catholic Churches have chosen to recall the wisdom of the ancient Church, and to follow the practice of seeking the collective wisdom of the community at every level of our Communion. We believe that all voices should be heard and consulted, drawing on the gifts of each.^{vii}

“Synodal” means, simply, all-embracing or inclusive of all. It is listening to the voices of all in sacred trust and the community of faith. Secure in our faith and Tradition we hold that all women and men are created in God’s image and likeness and that the same divine teaching on how they should live is written in every human heart. All persons are to be treated with dignity and justice. We understand synodal to mean that the three separate but interdependent voices of all the church, the laity, the clergy, and the bishops, are to come together in prayer and consultation for decision-making, for living our faith in service to others.

i Didache, 15:1-2.

ii 1 Clement, 44,5

iii Epistle, 67, 3, CSEL, 3.2.737

iv Epistle, iv, 5; PL, 50, 431

v Epistle, x, 4; PL, 54, 634

vi Epistle xxvi, PL, 4, 234

vii 1 Cor. 1 – 30

